

California Central Coast Chapter

April 2023

A monthly newsletter for people caring for those affected by Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia.

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Thou Shalt not Argue

This month, we're taking a look back at an article that we share in our Support Groups and education programs. The message of this article is simple and powerful: do not argue with a person who is living with dementia.

The first golden rule for people caring for people affected with dementia is "Do Not Argue". This is especially important in the later stages of dementia.

In his popular book, *What Now?*, Julian Dean explains: "If she thinks her husband is still alive, that is her reality. Arguing with her will encourage frustration, confusion, fear, anger and a difficult time for both of you. This is not about 'being correct.' This is about helping a person with a serious disability."

However counterproductive arguing with a person with dementia is, whatever distressing effects it creates over and over, not arguing is one of the most difficult lessons a care-giver will have to learn.

That's because the human brain is hard-wired to want to be right. Our brains associate being right with a feeling of satisfaction and well being. Winning an argument and proving oneself right feels good. It makes one feel self-assured, respected, confident. On the other hand, losing an argument and being proved wrong is often associated with feelings of



being demoralized, disrespected, ridiculed and challenged. These are all negative feelings. Wanting to prove one's point is human nature. All through our lives, we have worked on improving our communication skills so we can get our point across. We love to be right. We love being on the side of those who are right. We associate being right with being successful.

Now, when caring for someone with dementia, we are suddenly asked to do the exact opposite. Do not try to reason! Do not confront! Do not point out they are wrong! Do not argue! Being right may lead you to failure.

This is because patients with advancing dementia experience a decline in their reasoning skills at the same time that they experience an increase in emotional responses. Facts, dates, causes, consequences and logic become increasingly less important. Feelings, however, grow in importance and intensity.

The golden rule exists to enhance wellness, not rightness. Promoting pleasant feelings, even when based on a falsehood, will generate a

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feeling of well being. Making your loved one feel wrong, even when you are so obviously right, will make them feel bad, defensive and angry, and they will be more likely to dig in his heels. Their dementia will make you the enemy.

The skilled caregiver has learned how to put on hold their own need to be right, has learned to use strategy and finesse when handling a difficult situation, and knows when to refocus and redirect, avoiding confrontation.

Most of all, the skilled caregiver has learned not to take it personally - which is equally important if you are going to protect yourself from developing your own negative feelings about "being wrong" all the time!

Tragically, family caregivers are under a tremendous amount of relentless stress. The more stressed you are, the less able you are to control your own negative feelings.

The 1936 Carnegie's classic "How to Win Friends and Influence People" brings a powerful message that is still relevant today. Carnegie proposes six ways to make people like you:

1. Become genuinely interested in other people.
2. Smile.
3. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
5. Talk in terms of the other person's interests. Make the other person feel important - and do it sincerely.

Healthy Aging Club

An Active Social Club for those living in the early stages of dementia

2nd & 4th Thursdays

10 - 11:30am

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

1344 Nipomo St, San Luis Obispo

RSVP to Laura DeLoye at ladeloye@alz.org

Carnegie's timeless philosophy revolves entirely around putting your own feelings and self-interests aside and focusing on the other person. His suggestions are particularly useful when applied to caring for a loved one with dementia. At the end of the day, it is your approach that will set the tone for their feelings of well-being.

But if you get caught in the trap of feeling bad for not having your points validated, try to remember: How important is it in the grand scheme of things? Is it really worth getting upset about it? Is it worth ruining the rest of your day over it?

Joining a support group can be extremely helpful in reducing caregiver stress and developing healthy communications skills and strategies. Your local Alzheimer's Association offers support groups and other resources to assist you in caregiving for your loved one. And when caring for a loved one with dementia, the best time to call for help is always before you need it.

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